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TAGS: [MARR](#) [PREL](#) [NATO](#) [RU](#) [GM](#)  
SUBJECT: GERMANS MOSTLY POSITIVE ON MISSILE DEFENSE  
ANNOUNCEMENT, HOPE FOR COOPERATION WITH RUSSIA

REF: A. STATE 96550  
[1](#)B. USNATO 395

Classified By: POLITICAL MINISTER COUNSELOR GEORGE GLASS. REASONS: 1.4  
(B) AND (D).

[1](#)1. (S) SUMMARY. German reaction to the President's September 17 announcement has been mostly positive, with both Chancellor Merkel and FM Steinmeier issuing public statements welcoming the new U.S. approach on European missile defense and hoping this paves the way for greater cooperation on MD with Russia. FDP leader Guido Westerwelle, a possible future foreign minister, also praised the decision, but then went on to reiterate his view that the new German government should seek the withdrawal of all remaining nuclear weapons in Germany by 2013. In response to the ref A points, the MFA NATO Office deputy director agreed that the ball was in the Russian court to respond positively to the U.S. announcement, since it went a long way to addressing their alleged concerns about European MD. He thought the NATO-Russia Council would be a good forum to engage the Russians on the new U.S. approach. He also wondered whether the U.S. would seek at some point to deploy SM-3 interceptors in Germany in order to provide protection to U.S. bases and troops. END SUMMARY.

#### PUBLIC STATEMENTS

[1](#)2. (SBU) Both Chancellor Merkel and FM Steinmeier made public statements immediately after the White House announcement, welcoming the new U.S. approach on European missile defense. Merkel said the decision was a "hopeful sign for overcoming the difficulties with Russia concerning a common strategy for fighting the threat posed by Iran." She hoped that "we will now manage to stand together in speaking with Iran, and if that is not successful, to implement sanctions." In a clear allusion to Russia, Steinmeier said he was "glad that we will have the opportunity after today's decision to discuss once again the issue of missile defense in Europe afresh with all partners." He welcomed the new approach as a sign from the U.S. Administration that it was committed to finding "joint solutions to joint problems."

[1](#)3. (SBU) Prominent politicians from Merkel's Christian Democratic Union (CDU) and Steinmeier's Social Democratic Party (SPD) fell in line behind the new U.S. approach. CDU foreign affairs spokesman Eckart von Klaeden hoped the decision would lead Russia to give up its heretofore "seesaw policy" toward Iran and be ready to support tougher sanctions. He noted that if Iran gave up its nuclear plans, the MD plan could even be "fully abandoned." SPD arms control spokesman Rolf Muetzenich said the decision was important for concluding the START I follow-up treaty by the end of the year and was a hopeful signal for the 2010 Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The reactions from other German politicians were also mostly positive, although some tried to use the

announcement to score electoral points in the run-up to the September 27 Bundestag election or to push other agendas. Greens Deputy Caucus Chair Juergen Trittin described the decision as a "slap in the face" for the Chancellor, since she had supported the previous plan to station MD elements in Poland and the Czech Republic. Free Democratic Party (FDP) chair Guido Westerwelle, who is likely to become foreign minister if his party and Merkel's CDU/Christian Social Union (CSU) win a parliamentary majority in the upcoming election, thought the new U.S. approach would create "additional international confidence." But he then went on to reiterate his view that the new German government had to negotiate with the U.S. about a withdrawal of all remaining nuclear weapons in Germany by 2013.

#### MFA REACTION

15. (S) Post delivered ref A's unclassified points to MFA NATO Office Deputy Director Gunnar Denecke just before the White House announcement, and then followed up shortly afterwards with the classified NATO points. Like the German PermRep at NATO (ref B), Denecke responded cautiously and did not immediately offer an opinion one way or the other on the new U.S. approach. He wondered what would be the implications of this decision on "our work in NATO" on MD and the ALTBMD program. In particular, he wanted to hear more from us on what action we planned to pursue in NATO to take this forward. However, he asked -- only half-jokingly -- that we put off any big announcements or decisions in this regard off until after the September 27 Bundestag election.

16. (S) Denecke was also interested in how we planned to take

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the U.S. plans forward vis-a-vis the Russians. He stressed that this would be a good opportunity to work cooperatively with the Russians on MD, rather than letting it continue to be a point of confrontation. He said it would make sense for this to be part of the work of the NATO-Russia Council (NRC), given that theater missile defense has always been touted as potentially fruitful area of cooperation. He agreed that the ball was in the Russian court to respond positively to the U.S. announcement, since it went a long way to addressing their alleged concerns about European MD.

17. (S) From a public relations point of view, Denecke thought it was important to make sure that people (especially in Germany) did not only hear that the U.S. was abandoning its previous MD plans in Poland and Czech Republic. They had to understand that the U.S. was only changing its approach, not giving up on European MD altogether. Otherwise, this could lead to misunderstandings later. He also raised the possibility that under the "phased, adaptive approach," the U.S. could seek to deploy SM-3 interceptors in Germany (he mentioned Ramstein) in order to provide protection to U.S. bases and troops. In response, we stressed that any such decision was down the road and that any further deployment of SM-3s beyond the first phase would depend on the evolution of the Iranian ballistic missile threat.

18. (S) Regarding how this would play domestically in Germany, Denecke said he could see how some in the CDU would see this announcement as undercutting them since Merkel and the CDU had been generally supportive of the Bush plan for MD, while the SPD and opposition were always more skeptical. That said, he thought the opportunity for scoring electoral points against the CDU on this basis was limited.

#### CHANCELLERY REACTION

19. (C) Short before the arrival of the ref A instruction, Chancellery Security Affairs Director Geza von Geyr called the DCM to express concern that some in the German press were characterizing the expected U.S. decision on stopping work on MD sites in Poland and Czech Republic as a slap at the Chancellor, since she had supported this plan. He said that

given the ongoing election campaign, this was obviously of some concern. The timely White House announcement and the ref A instruction on the new U.S. approach to European MD allowed us to quickly follow up with von Geyr and to assuage his concerns. They also allowed us to stem what could have developed into an unhelpful political debate on MD before the German election.

Murphy